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General debate on national experience in population matters: realizing the future we want — integrating population issues into sustainable development, including in the post-2015 development agenda

Statement submitted by Stichting dance4life, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council*

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.

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Statement

This statement is written on behalf of The PACT,* a collaboration of 25 youth organizations, including young people living with HIV and young people from key populations, committed to work together to ensure the health, well-being and human rights of all young people.

Today there are 1.8 billion young people between the ages of 10 and 24. As the post-2015 development agenda takes shape, the voices, realities, needs, and rights of young people are systematically overlooked.

HIV is now the second leading cause of death for adolescents worldwide. In 2013, almost 60 per cent of all new HIV infections among young people aged 15-24 occurred among adolescent girls and young women (UNAIDS 2014). And while efforts to reduce the preventable deaths due to complications during pregnancy and childbirth have intensified, they remain the leading cause of death of adolescent girls aged 15-19 (UNFPA 2014).

The Secretary-General's Index Report on the ICPD Programme of Action called for scaling up, standardizing and strengthening youth-friendly health policies and programmes, including the full participation of young people in the development and implementation of such programmes. We welcome this call and urge Member States to take concrete steps during the Commission on Population and Development to turn this call into action.

Through the ACT 2015 movement, over 187 community dialogues were held in every region by young people from late 2013 through early 2014. These community dialogues allowed young people, including the most marginalized and vulnerable, to set their advocacy priorities for the post-2015 development agenda.

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* The PACT is a collaboration between the following organizations:
Association Affirmative Action
Association de Lutte Contre le SIDA
dance4life
Espolea
Girl-Talk Foundation
Global Youth Coalition on HIV/AIDS
Haus of Khameleon
HIV Young Leaders Fund
IFMSA
International Community of Women Living with HIV
International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer Youth and Student Organisation (IGLYO)
International Planned Parenthood Federation
Jamaica Youth Advocacy Network
Men who have sex with men Global Forum
MTV Staying Alive Foundation
Namibia Women's Health Network
Next Step
Uganda Network of Young People Living with HIV
Women Deliver
Y+, the Global Network of Young People Living with HIV
Youth Peer Education Network (Y-PEER)
Youth Coalition for Sexual and Reproductive Rights
Youth LEAD
Youth RISE
Youth Voices Count

Based on the outcomes of the 187 community dialogues, we call upon the Commission on Population and Development to include the following recommendations for integrating population issues and the voices of young people into the Post-2015 development agenda:

First, target 3.3 on ending the AIDS epidemic by 2030 must outline a specific indicator that measures progress towards ending the AIDS epidemic among adolescents and young people by guaranteeing equitable, universal, and affordable access to prevention, treatment, care and support for all people across the life course.

Moreover, through the ACT 2015 community dialogues, young people around the world make a clear and collective call to end stigma and discrimination, particularly for young people living with HIV and young people from key populations, including young people who inject drugs, young people involved in selling sex and young men who have sex with men and young transgender people. It will be impossible to end the AIDS epidemic unless we invest in programmes that challenge the social and cultural environment in which stigma and discrimination are allowed to thrive. Tracking progress towards zero stigma and zero discrimination must be included as an indicator in relation to target 3.3.

Second, to end the AIDS epidemic by 2030, young people have called for the transformation of social norms around gender and sexuality so that all young people, in all their diversity, are free from stigma and discrimination.

Third, we call upon Member States to formulate specific indicators under the health and education goal to ensure universal access to comprehensive sexuality education. Again and again young people have made this call, through various post-2015 consultations and in numerous formal settings. Today, we are again insisting that our right to comprehensive sexuality education be recognized and formalized within the SDG framework.

Fourth, too often, adolescents and young people living with HIV are treated not as rights-holders but as beneficiaries of treatment programmes. All young people have the right to access sexual and reproductive health services and information and make independent decisions about our own bodies. We therefore urge Member States to ensure the health goal addresses the political determinants of health, such as age-related barriers to HIV testing and other services including harm reduction.

To conclude, in order to ensure a more equitable, rights-based and youth-friendly HIV response, we need:

1. A specific target for universal sexual and reproductive health rights in the health goal;

2. A specific target for universal access to harm reduction services in the health goal;

3. Indicators that measure coverage of comprehensive sexuality education and increase in young people's HIV knowledge;

4. An indicator tracking progress on stigma and discrimination, particularly on age, gender, sexual orientation and gender identity and HIV status;

5. An overall framework that addresses the political and social determinants of health;

6. And, to ensure equity, we must measure progress on all targets by data disaggregated by sex and age.

For years we have raised our voices to call for a progressive post-2015 development agenda that protects the sexual and reproductive health and rights of all people, everywhere. We cannot allow the promise of youth in the post-2015 agenda to only address less controversial agendas such as employment and education. Member States only identifying and promoting certain needs of young people is not acceptable. We have now a brief window of opportunity to ensure that the rights of all people, particularly young people, adolescents and others who are marginalized through systems of inequality, are upheld and protected at all costs. We urge Member States to hear our call to action: you must not allow our human rights to be deemed "too controversial".